

MINUTES
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission Meeting
FWP Headquarters - Helena, MT
August 30, 2012

Commission Members Present: Bob Ream, Chairman; Ron Moody; Shane Colton (via AV system Billings)

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Dave Risley, Fish & Wildlife Administrator, and FWP Staff.

Guests: See August 30, 2012 Commission file folder for sign-in sheet.

Topics of Discussion:

1. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Minutes of August 02, 2012 Commission Meeting
3. Commission Reports
4. Director's Report
5. MSGDE License Auction Administrative Rule – Final
6. Non Resident Deer Licenses Separated from Big Game Combination Licenses Administrative Rule – Final
7. Drought Update
8. 2012 Future Fisheries Funding Cycle – Final
9. Amelia Island FAS DNRC Easement – Endorsement
10. Island Lake FAS Addition – Endorsement
11. Draft Statewide Fisheries Management Plan – Decision to Proceed
12. 2012 Late Season Waterfowl Seasons/Closures – Final
13. 2012 CSKT Upland Bird and Waterfowl Regulations – Final
14. West Kootenai Timber Management – Final
15. Braun Property Donation – Endorsement
16. Wildlife Management Area Biennial Rules – Proposed
17. Wolf Human Dimensions Survey Results – Informational
18. Raptor Propagation Follow-Up
19. Hunting Season Closures - Informational
20. Brucellosis / Elk Working Group Recommendations - Informational
21. Microphone – Public Opportunity to Address FWP Issues Not on Agenda

1. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Ream called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of the Commission Meeting Minutes of August 02, 2012.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the motion to approve the August 02, 2012 minutes. Motion carried.

3. Commission Reports.

Commissioner Colton reported a lot of fires and watching water temperatures and rivers levels. Having some anxiety over archery season opening on Saturday.

Commissioner Moody went to Boise to attend and observe the Idaho Wildlife Summit. This key public event was hosted by the Idaho Fish and Game Agency. It was clear that the State of Idaho

hunters and anglers understand the way we do business is breaking down new and different things, but before we can do that, we have to express great leadership and quit arguing with stake holder groups, along with other constituents and work together. Gave a lot of value and we can learn a lot from this experience.

Chairman Ream reported the Wildlife Management Institute did a report on the Fish and Wildlife Service showing an increase in young hunters and anglers, reversing the trend from recent years, which is good to see.

5. MSGDE License Auction Administrative Rule – Final.

Hank Worschech, Licensing Bureau Chief, reported State law allows the Commission to issue each: one mountain sheep, Shiras moose, mountain goat, mule deer, and elk license to species-specific conservation groups to use and conduct an auction or lottery. Historically the Commission has adopted annual rules regarding the procedure to issue these licenses year after year without any changes or controversy. On May 24, the Commission proposed the language contained in the annual rule as administrative rules rather than addressing the rules annually. A hearing was held June 21 with no public attendance and the Commission received no comments.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the Commission adopt the proposed administrative rules for the auction/lottery of moose, sheep, goat, mule deer and elk licenses. Motion Carried.

6. Non Resident Deer Licenses Separated from Big Game Combination Licenses Administrative Rule – Final.

Hank Worschech, Licensing Bureau Chief, reported State law allows the Commission to separate the Class B-7 license from the Class B-10 license and sell the separated license as a Class B-11 license. Historically, the Commission has adopted annual rules regarding the procedure to issue these licenses year after year without any changes or controversy. On May 24, the Commission proposed the language contained in the annual rule as administrative rules rather than addressing the rules annually. A hearing was held on June 22, with no public attendance and the Commission received one comment in favor of the change.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the Commission adopt the proposed administrative rule for the nonresident deer licenses separated from big game combination licenses.

Commissioner Moody commented that the Finance Licensing Bureau should look at a long term plan for moving away from combination licenses to free standing licenses.

Worschech stated there has been a request by a legislature for information in changing the rule.

Risley explained it takes legislative action to change the rule and it's in the process to be looked at during the upcoming legislation.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried.

7. Drought Update.

Bruce Rich, Chief of Fisheries, reported for the first time in a while that the drought situation is improving. Region 1 and 2 are in good shape water wise and don't anticipate any fishing restrictions. Region 3 has low flows but with shorting day

length and cooler nights don't anticipate any fishing restrictions. Region 4 had significant improvement in temperatures. Asked for Commissioner Moody's concurrence to remove the fishing restrictions on the Sun River and Smith River effective August 31. Commissioner Moody agreed. The Dearborn River is severely dewatered and will leave the restrictions on until September 15 or longer if necessary. Region 5 water levels and temperatures are fine, no fishing restrictions. Region 6 had minor fish kills in Fort Peck Reservoir due to elevated water temperatures; the condition has been alleviated by cooler temperatures. Suffering from severe fire conditions and potentially stage two restrictions out in the field but no angling restrictions are anticipated. Region 7 flows remain low on the Powder River and Tongue River, and especially the Lower Yellowstone; no resource issue is foreseen.

8. 2012 Future Fisheries Funding Cycle – Final.

Bruce Rich, Chief of Fisheries, explained the Future Fisheries Improvement Program provides funds for projects that restore fishery habitats in streams, rivers and lakes for the benefit of wild fisheries. Applications are reviewed twice each year by a 14-member citizen review panel appointed by the Governor or his/her designee. Citizen Panel recommendations are forwarded to the Commission every six months for its consideration and approval. For the summer 2012 funding cycle, the Citizen Panel recommends funding 8 of 10 submitted proposals at a program cost of \$126,258. Matching funds or in-kind contributions from outside sources total \$570,855. All applications received for the funding cycle were posted on the FWP website, which allows viewers to submit on-line public comment and a public meeting was held in Helena on June 28. The only comments came from applicants attending the public meeting. An Environmental Assessment was prepared for each project recommended for funding, with the exception of proposals that fall under categorical exclusions (defined under ARM), the Federal National Environmental Policy Act, or ongoing regional processes.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded to approve the Future Fisheries Citizen Panel funding recommendations for the summer 2012 funding cycle of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program.

Chairman Ream asked if the Cottonwood Creek mentioned goes through the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range.

Rich replied this Cottonwood Creek runs through the Beartooth Game Range.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried

Commissioner Moody stated the Citizen Panel does such a great job and relies on their judgment. The Panel is very thorough and protects the public's interest. Would like to send a message to the Panel of a job well done.

Rich dually noted and will make sure they see the comment in the minutes. Went on a summer field tour with the Panel this summer, very impressed with the projects and the acumen and the dedication of these individuals is very impressive.

9. Amelia Island FAS DNRC Easement – Endorsement.

Bruce Rich, Chief of Fisheries, explained the Amelia Island Fishing Access Site is located along the Yellowstone River near the town of Hysham. A private landowner donated the 4.8-acre parcel to FWP in 2008 for use as a public fishing access site. The site is an important location for public access on the Yellowstone, with the closest FWP fishing access sites located 7 miles upstream and 20 miles downstream. Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) officials recently notified FWP that a portion of the land believed to be owned by the landowner who donated the property is actually an accreted island owned by DNRC. (A small channel of the river separates the donated property from the main river channel and creates an island, which belongs to the state and is administered by DNRC.) FWP commissioned a survey of the accreted land and determined that it is 1.8 acres in size. FWP engineers concluded that this DNRC parcel is the only location suitable for providing access to the river – the donated property is not directly adjacent to the river. FWP is seeking the Commission's approval to negotiate a perpetual easement for use of the DNRC parcel. FWP would then develop a public boat launching facility at the site. Future development may include a parking lot, vault latrine, fencing, rock barriers and signage.

Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Commissioner Moody seconded the Commission authorize the Department to negotiate a perpetual easement with DNRC at the Amelia Island Fishing Access Site on the Yellowstone River. Motion Carried

10. Island Lake FAS Addition – Endorsement.

Bruce Rich, Chief of Fisheries, explained the Island Lake FAS was acquired in 2000 and is located approximately 20 miles west of Kalispell and 30 miles north of Highway 2. Access from Highway 2 is from the south via the Pleasant Valley and Island Lake roads. The last approximately one-fourth mile of road to the site is a primitive unimproved gravel road through a section of land owned by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). MDT granted FWP an easement through its land to access the FAS. The primitive nature of this access road poses a challenge if FWP were to improve it to similar access road standards at other FAS's due to anticipated construction and maintenance costs for a road of that condition and length. The preliminary cost estimate is in excess of \$50,000. An alternative is to develop a shorter, new road into the FAS

from the north side of the property via the Island Lake Road. A small approximately two-acre parcel of private land separates the FAS from this road. The landowner has indicated that he would sell FWP that parcel but is not interested in providing an easement for concern it would have a negative effect on the land's value.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the Commission authorize the Department to further examine the cost benefit analysis of acquiring the private parcel for construction of an access road to the Island Lake FAS.

Chairman Ream asked if the parcel belongs to Warren and Joann Illi and any idea of the land value.

Rich replied the value of the land has not been assessed nor what kind of compensation the Illi's are seeking, but they have expressed their willingness to sell to FWP but are not interested in an easement.

Chairman Ream noted the Warren Illi has been very active with the Flathead Wildlife and a Forest Service employee for many years.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried.

11. Draft Statewide Fisheries Management Plan – Decision to Proceed.

Bruce Rich, Chief of Fisheries, stated today is a rare occurrence. FWP is proposing a draft of the first Statewide Fisheries Management Plan and seeking the Commission's permission to proceed with public involvement (FWP will also conduct an Environmental Analysis on the draft plan and solicit public comments). The plan identifies the overarching goals and direction for core fisheries programs, including fish management, aquatic habitat, fishing access and angling opportunities. At a watershed scale, the plan establishes the management direction for each water body under FWP authority, the management objectives for the fish found in the water body, and any special considerations or management issues that apply. The plan also provides the public with an overview on the laws, rules and policies that affect fisheries management and the framework for decision-making and project priority setting. The final plan will provide guidance to FWP and the FWP Commission in the development of future policies and regulations. In routine fish management work, the decision making processes are often unnecessarily difficult due to opposing values, needs and desires of various stakeholders. This plan is an attempt to resolve as much conflict as possible in an upfront planning process that is reactive instead at every single decision. The plan is broken into two parts:

- 1. Background of the Fisheries Program**
 - a. Fisheries Management – Hatcheries
 - b. Fisheries Habitat
 - c. Fishing Access and Recreation Management
- 2. Management Direction for Drainages**
 - a. Drainage Narrative
 - b. Management Direction

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Chairman Ream seconded the FWP Commission approve the Department's request to begin soliciting public comments on the draft Statewide Fisheries Management Plan and report back with its findings and a final recommendation.

Commissioner Moody asked if the environmental chapter will be an EIS level document in its final plan.

Rich replied an environmental analysis will be done.

Commissioner Moody stated he cannot visualize an environmental impact statement for fisheries for the State of Montana.

Risley explained there was a lot of internal discussion. Doing an environmental analysis on this particular document lacks some specific action and makes it difficult to do the assessment without those specific actions; subsequently the other parts of the plan will need a environment analysis. The environment analysis is the best path because of the lack of hard data.

Commissioner Moody asked if it is necessary to apply the environmental status.

Risley explained the statute is fairly clear that an environmental analysis has to be done.

Chairman Ream commended Rich and his staff, they have done an outstanding job, especially the approach of setting priorities on stretches of streams. Noted that page five, paragraph two, explains the challenges and how complex the plan is. Recommends adding climate changes into that paragraph.

Rich dually noted the recommendation.

Commissioner Colton applauded Rich and his staff and the need to communicate effectively with our constituents.

Chairman Ream asked for public comment.

Chairman Ream asked if the stretches on the drainages are broken down where there may be different priorities or objectives.

Rich explained when the regions wrote their plans, they broke the drainages down into different groupings. Mentioned the feature story in the July/August issue of *Montana Outdoors* titled Crystal Clear – FWP explains its logic behind its Fishing Management Decision. Very good explanation of the plan and what is in it for all parties, but especially the public.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried.

12. 2012 Late Season Waterfowl Seasons/Closures – Final.

George Pauley, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, explained late season migratory bird hunting regulations pertain to ducks, geese, swans, and coots. Montana participates in both the Central and Pacific Flyways and adheres to the federal frameworks established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the flyway councils. Frameworks are based on population status from winter surveys for geese and May population and habitat surveys for ducks. Duck seasons are developed with an adaptive harvest approach with three specific regulation packages (restrictive, moderate, liberal) based on pond counts and mallard breeding populations. Recent habitat conditions and population numbers are favorable allowing liberal season frameworks. May duck surveys revealed record numbers of ducks, 43 percent above the long-term average, although pond counts were down from 2011. In response to Commission direction at the August 2 meeting, two options were proposed for consideration in the Central Flyway, and are generally described below. Public comment period ended August 27 and received 121 comments. There was some support for option two but an overwhelming amount of comments expressing various concerns with splitting the season. Discussions on zoning in the Central Flyway regarding to having a north and south zone as well as different seasons is not available in the Federal framework. Geese zones would likely be approved next June for next year's season. Duck zones are in place until 2016 because of the five year framework.

Risley asked if next year there was a proposal for a zone for geese, is that subject to the five year framework.

Jim Hansen, Region 5 waterfowl biologist, indicated only duck zones are subject to the five year framework, geese zones would be implemented year to year.

There is no proposed split in the Pacific Flyway.

1. No change from the 2011 Central Flyway framework – no breaks within the season dates.
2. Mid-season split – Close the Central Flyway duck and goose seasons during October 15-30, and then re-open the season(s) extending the ending dates later into January.

Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Commissioner Moody seconded to adopt the final 2012 late waterfowl seasons, specifically option one, without a mid-season closure, as proposed by FWP.

Commissioner Colton asked the Department to seek the zone change for geese in the Central Flyway.

Commissioner Colton requests to withdraw his motion.

Commissioner Moody motions duck and goose seasons have a break in January and reopen on a weekend.

Chairman Ream asked for public comment.

Ron Aasheim, Communication & Education Bureau Chief, commented it is very confusing when you have different days and closures for ducks and geese, very complicated for hunters.

After a lengthy discussion it was concluded that duck season would stay the same, goose season dates would end January 6, 2013 and reopen January 9 – 13, 2013 for the Central Flyway.

Action: Commissioner Moody amended and Commissioner Colton seconded the motion for no change from the 2011 Central Flyway duck framework – no breaks within the season dates. Central Flyway geese season dates would end January 6, 2013 and reopen January 9 – 13, 2013. Pacific Flyway framework motioned as proposed. Motion Carried.

Commissioner Colton stated that climate changes and other factors are going to impact opportunity and having rigid dates is something that FWP needs to be aware of.

13. 2012 CSKT Upland Bird and Waterfowl Regulations – Final.

George Pauley, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, explained the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the State of Montana have entered into a positive, cooperative management agreement on the Flathead Reservation that provides for presentation of Tribal season setting products to the FWP Commission. Regional FWP staff is included in the development of Tribal upland game bird regulations. Tribal recommendations are first presented to the Flathead Reservation Fish and Wildlife Board. The board votes on tentative proposals and opens them to general public review and comment. The board then meets for final adoption. Adopted final proposals are then presented to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council. FWP Commission endorsement is subject to final Tribal Council approval. Other than text style, format and/or presentation, the significant differences between these Tribal regulations and the current or proposed FWP upland bird and waterfowl regulations are:

- Tribal shooting hours primarily being sunrise to sunset for all game birds;
- A requirement that only non-toxic shot be used for all game birds on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded that the FWP Commission endorse the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes upland game bird and waterfowl regulations as presented and subject to final Tribal Council approval. Motion Carried.

14. West Kootenai Timber Management – Final.

Ken McDonald, Chief of Wildlife, explained that FWP has proposed to thin approximately 240 acres of dense conifer forest on the West Kootenai WMA, in an effort to reduce wildfire risks, improve wildlife habitat, and improve forest health. A 2009 petition signed by 57 area residents urged FWP to conduct thinning on the WMA to protect against wildfire. Thinning efforts will be focused along approximately 12,000 feet of interior roads and areas adjacent to private lands, with several interior thinning units as well. Approximately 300 yards of road must be constructed in order to complete the project. A DNRC forest health grant for \$41,000 has been received to help complete this project, after the sale of merchantable timber, it is expected to cost FWP an additional \$45,000 from the Habitat Montana WMA Operations and Maintenance account. A Draft EA was released for a three-week period from July 31 through August 21. A public meeting was held on August 9 in the West Kootenai Community which was attended by 27 people. Notices have been posted in area newspapers and on August 8 the Tobacco Valley News printed a front-page article describing the project. The vast majority of comments received have been favorable, with some concerns expressed for public safety, especially regarding logging truck traffic.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the Commission approve the West Kootenai WMA forest management project as proposed.

Chairman Ream commented the staff did an excellent job on the EA, it is clear and laid out very well. Great public support.

Commissioner Moody mentioned that a photograph of the timber would have been useful. Recommends timing the actual work on the ground not to be during hunting season or nutritional stress months.

McDonald reported during the last Legislative session there was a bill passed and dollars appropriated for completing a sustainable yield study on all FWP lands. A contractor has been selected and over the course of the next year forest inventory will be done on all WMA and fishing access sites that have more than 50 acres of contiguous woods. Is a good planning tool for forest management.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried.

15. Braun Property Donation – Endorsement.

Ken McDonald, Chief of Wildlife, explained a landowner has approached FWP about donating property to the Department for wildlife conservation and public use. The property consists of 1,090 acres of deeded land in the breaks habitat along the north shore of the Missouri River, approximately 13 miles southwest of Big Sandy. Adjacent to the property, there are 475 acres of public DNRC and BLM lands. Nearly the entire property proposed for donation is native habitat, much of which is classified as Tier I habitat (i.e., mixed grass prairie, shrub-grassland, and riparian habitat). The grassland habitat above the breaks is primarily mixed-grass prairie dominated by western wheatgrass with small patches of Wyoming big sagebrush. Several branches of Spring Coulee traverse the property, comprising a mix of silver sagebrush grasslands, badlands, and greasewood flats. The property appears to provide good mule deer habitat and also supports antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, and a variety of nongame wildlife associated with mixed grass and shrub habitats. Accessibility may be a problem.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the Commission give preliminary approval to FWP to conduct appropriate analysis and public review for accepting this land donation as a Wildlife Management Area.

Chairman Ream asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried.

16. Wildlife Management Area Biennial Rules – Proposed.

Ken McDonald, Chief of Wildlife, reported that thanks to former Chief Legal Counsel, Bob Lane who initiated the Wildlife Management Area Biennial Rules, FWP has finally developed a set of proposed Commission rules that are intended to direct public use on all FWP Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). These rules are clear, concise and easier for enforcement to enforce. In the past, there has been variability and a lack of clarity related to public use rules among the state's 77 WMAs. These rules will provide consistency and clarity and are intended for biennial updates as needed. The purpose of these rules is to protect wildlife habitat; wildlife presence and public use of the WMAs; including but not limited to fishing, trapping and hunting opportunities. All other uses are secondary and must be in accord with the primary goals and objectives of the wildlife management areas. Most everything is status quo for the WMAs with some exceptions.

RULE 1. WINTER CLOSURES

1. Wildlife Management Areas, or portions of, which are specifically managed as big game winter range are closed to all public entry from December 1 at 11:59pm until May 15 at noon each year. Open dates may change from time to time due to weather or other unforeseen events.

EXCEPTIONS to Rule 1. Sec.1:

Mt. Jumbo WMA opens May 1 at noon.

Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA closes November 10 at 11:59 pm (only that portion within deer/elk hunting district 282).

Calf Cr. WMA opens April 15 at noon.

Mt. Silcox WMA opens April 1 at noon.

Roundhorn WMA opens May 1 at noon.

Beckman WMA opens April 1 at noon and closes January 1 at 11:59pm.

Marias River WMA opens April 1 at noon and closes January 14 at 11:59pm,

Mt.Haggin WMA: that portion of the WMA that occurs west of the continental divide stays open to non-motorized access.

Mt. Haggin WMA: a portion of Mt. Haggin is open to cross-country snowmobile use from December 2 to May15. See Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest travel map for details.

Swan Valley WMA: open to public use year-round.

(History: Secs. 23-1-106, 87-1-303, 23-1-102MCA)

2. Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) not managed specifically for big game winter range (such as waterfowl and wetlands) are open for public entry year-round unless subject to site restrictions which are posted on site

EXCEPTIONS to Rule 1. Sec.2:

North Shore WMA closed to all public use from February 28 at 11:59 pm to July 15 at noon.

RULE 2. HUNTING & TRAPPING SEASONS

RULE 3. GROUP USE

RULE 4. VEHICLE USE

RULE 5. CAMPING

3. Region Seven: camping limited to 7 days within a 30 day period. Daily occupancy is required. This is a result of the oil field workers parking their trailers and living on the WMA. Making sure there is recreational opportunity for people to use the WMA instead of overuse and inappropriate use.

RULE 6. WATERCRAFT

RULE 7. WEED FREE FEED

RULE 8. ANIMAL CONTROL

RULE 9. DOG TRAINING

RULE 10. COMMERCIAL USE

RULE 11. FIREWOOD

RULE 12. FIRES

RULE 13. WEAPONS

RULE 14. FIREWORKS

RULE 15. SIGNS

RULE 16. FOOD STORAGE

BEAR RESISTANT FOOD STORAGE REQUIRED ON FOLLOWING WMAS PER FOOD STORAGE ORDER (ATTACHED)

R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
ALL WMAS	ALL WMAS	MT. HAGGIN BEAR CR. WALL CR. BLACKTAIL ROBB/LEDGFORD GALLATIN FLEECER MTN. DOMO MTN.	BLACKLEAF EAR MTN MARIAS RIVER SUN RIVER	SILVER RUN HAYMAKER

RULE 17. SAFETY ZONES

RULE 18. ANIMAL CARCASSES

RULE 19. HUNTING BLINDS, TREE STANDS, GOOSE PITS

RULE 20. REMOVAL OF NATURAL RESOURCES

RULE 21. SPECIES TRANSLOCATION

RULE 22. LITTERING

RULE 23. ANTLER COLLECTING

RULE 24. SECONDARY RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Chairman Ream seconded the Commission give preliminary endorsement to the proposed rules.

Chairman Ream asked if Region 1 has always prohibited camping on all WMAs.

McDonald replied yes, they tend to be smaller and closer proximity to larger population centers. Also, with the endorsement from Commissioners, they will have a public review and comment period with the final rule presented in the October or November Commission meeting.

Chairman Ream asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Carried.

17. Wolf Human Dimensions Survey Results – Informational.

Ken McDonald, Chief of Wildlife, reported that there has been 1,600 people interested in wolf trapping courses. George Pauley and Brian Giddings have worked with the Regions to schedule the classes. Maximum class size will only be allowed to 50 people and will include instruction in the class and in the field.

Mike Lewis, Human Dimensions Unit, explained FWP recently conducted four separate surveys (Montana Household Survey, Resident Deer/Elk License Holder Survey, Resident Wolf License Hold Survey and Resident Private Landowner Survey) regarding Montana's wolf hunt. Survey findings revealed that tolerance with wolves being on the Montana landscape was quite low, considerable tolerance for the concept of wolf hunting in the state. Other survey findings revealed that public satisfaction with wolf management in the state significantly improved as a result of the 2011 Montana wolf hunt. While there was little agreement among survey respondents regarding whether or not the regulations for the 2011 Montana

wolf hunt were satisfactory, results suggest support for a more aggressive approach to wolf harvest regulations considering the fact that wolves are elusive and difficult to hunt even under the best of circumstances. These findings support the FWP Commission's recent decision to implement a more liberal wolf harvest package for the 2012 season.

18. Raptor Propagation Follow-Up.

Mike Lee, Commercial Wildlife Program Manager Enforcement Bureau, explained that after the recent adoption of Administrative Rules, the state falconry permit is now a mutual function of and coincides with the federal requirements regarding falconry. Lee reviewed a Falconry fact sheet that included: Becoming a Falconer; Current Status of Falconry in Montana; Propagation of Raptors; Peregrine Take in 2012; Number of Takes for Calendar Year 2012; Level of Take and Regulations Governing Take.

19. Hunting Season Closures – Informational.

Chairman Ream introduced the new Deputy Director Mike Volesky. Mike comes to FWP with a lot of experience in Natural Resource Management, and he and his family are all hunters.

Chairman Ream explained at the present time, the Commission has no plans for any closures, there is a possibility if the fire danger increases, calling an emergency Commission meeting and discussed further at that time.

Currently in Region 4 the block management areas participants are concerned about fires. Sixteen BMA's have requested closure of their land for hunting, do the fire danger.

Ron Aasheim reported FWP initiated the media effort two/three weeks ago explaining the potential of fires. Updating the website, radio television, newspaper as needed for fire restrictions. Restrictions are listed on the FWP website, along with what other land management agencies may impose. FWP understands the concerns and working hard to get the word out.

Alan Charles, Landowner Sportsman Coordinator, explained the Block Management program has a fire action plan. Regional coordinators submit on a daily basis, if necessary, a list of closures to himself and Bob Cochran, who works for the FWP interactive mapping department. Cochran posts any closures to the electronic BMA map on the FWP website and from there hunters can see what BMAs are closed and whom to contact for more information.

20. Brucellosis / Elk Working Group Recommendations – Informational.

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief, explained in fall 2011 the FWP Commission endorsed the concept of a citizen working group to explore elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis. The specific objective of this working group was to identify and propose elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis. As an initial step, the group framed a problem or issue statement to help communicate and guide this effort. The working group met six times and has developed guidelines and recommendations. FWP recognizes the members and all the hard work they have done and continue to do so. The working group members are: Mark R. Albrecht; John C. Anderson; Ed Bukoskey; Joe Cohenour; Rick Douglass; Rick Gibson; Lorents Grosfield; Ken Hamlin; Raymond Marxer; Charlie Noland; William Raths; C. Thomas Rice. The members are an extremely effective group that has taken a lot of time and made tough decisions, in debate conversations, in a civil and diplomatic way.

Brucellosis results from infection with the *Brucella abortus* bacteria and is known to exist in wild bison and elk and occasionally domestic livestock within the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). Recent livestock cases in the GYA have been linked to transmission from wildlife, with elk being the most likely source. While significant negative impacts to elk have not been clearly identified in Montana, brucellosis can impact the livestock industry and individual producers. Changes in USDA-APHIS rules reduced the likelihood of entire states losing brucellosis-free status because of isolated livestock cases, but put increased focus on areas where brucellosis is known to exist in wildlife. As a result, the Montana Board of Livestock established a designated surveillance area (DSA) in 2010, which requires increased cattle testing and vaccination efforts by producers within the DSA. Montana surveillance efforts using blood tests to determine exposure

rates (seroprevalence) to *B. abortus* in elk began in the late 1980s. Seroprevalence estimates for GYA elk from the late 1980s and early 1990s were below two percent. Surveillance conducted within the last 10-15 years reveal what appear to be increasing seroprevalence in some elk populations.

Dr. Jennifer Ramsey, FWP Wildlife Veterinarian, gave a lengthy discussion on what brucellosis is, how it is transmitted, where it locates, how it sheds, symptoms, detecting and how testing is done.

Dr. Eric Liska, MT Department of Livestock Brucellosis Veterinarian, gave a presentation regarding the basics, a broad overview of the Department of Livestock's brucellosis program, brief history and what burdens the livestock producers are facing.

Kujala thanked the Department of Livestock and other FWP employees that have worked very hard on this study. Their commitment is in place through the implementation period, to help the Department and the Commission.

Chairman Ream complimented everyone on the excellent presentation and asked if the information would be put on-line. Asked Kujala to let the Commissioners know when the working group meetings are going to be held.

Kujala answered yes, it is available on the website, and he will contact the Commissioners on meeting dates and times.

Joe Cohenour, working group member, stated the working group collaborated, not always agreeing, but in the end we understood what the discussion was about and how important this subject is.

John C. Anderson, working group member, encouraged the Commission to continue with the elk capture process, it has been very instrumental in providing information to the livestock producers and the severity of what the problem actually is.

C. Thomas Rice, working group member, thanked the Commission on the support they have given to the working group and asked all sportsman and the general public to be involved in the comment period.

Rick Douglass, working group member, stated the ongoing research effort that is ongoing is going to be valuable should other diseases appear, the more we understand what wildlife does on the landscape the better we will be able to understand other diseases. The more research we have, the better off we will be in the future.

21. Open Microphone – Public Opportunity to Address FWP Issues Not on Agenda.

Pat Helvey, East Helena, asked about the decision to allow trapping of the five wolverine quotas for the coming year. What science was used in that decision? There was a 152 page report that came in from a private entity, was it reviewed and a response given. She feels the decision was not grounded in science and had more to do with satisfying a specific group, mainly the trappers, would like some documentation of the reasoning.

Chairman Ream explained we did not receive a copy of the report until well after the comment period was over.

Ken McDonald explained two/three years ago the wolverine program was modified from ten to five trappings. There was a big piece of science that went into the justification and will get her the documentation.

Helvey asked if there was public comment and where was it published. It was not in the Independent Record and a lot of people do not have computers to get the information.

Chairman Ream clarified that it was published on the FWP website and in several newspapers across the state, received a lot of comments regarding the policy.

Action: Commissioner Moody moved and Commissioner Colton seconded the motion to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Dan Vermillion, Vice-Chairman

Joe Maurier, Director